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FM AMEMBASSY TOKYO  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4249  
INFO RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 7302  
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PRIORITY 1692  
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL PRIORITY 3361  
RUEHFK/AMCONSUL FUKUOKA PRIORITY 1414  
RUEHNH/AMCONSUL NAHA PRIORITY 3843  
RUEHOK/AMCONSUL OSAKA KOBE PRIORITY 4976  
RUEHKS O/AMCONSUL SAPPORO PRIORITY 2274  
RUEHSH/AMCONSUL SHENYANG PRIORITY 0489  
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L TOKYO 002530

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SUBJECT: JAPAN CONSIDERING PLIGHT OF DPRK BOAT REFUGEES

Classified By: Ambassador J. Thomas Schieffer. Reasons 1.4 (B) (D)

1.(C) On June 5, ROK Embassy First Secretary Kang Young-hoon provided Embassy Tokyo political officer with information concerning four DPRK refugees who landed in Japan after week-long journey across the Sea of Japan. According to Kang, the four individuals are members of a DPRK family that departed Chung-jin, North Korea on Sunday, May 27 in a 7-8 meter wooden fishing boat and arrived in Aomori Prefecture on Saturday, June 2. The family members' names:

-- Rim Il-Hwa father (bd 12/22/50)  
-- Kim Keum-soon mother (bd 4/11/45) (different last name)  
-- Rim Chung-ik son (bd 8/21/76)  
-- Rim Chung-il son (bd 7/7/80)

12. (C) The parents told Japanese officials they decided to leave the DPRK because of harsh living conditions in North Korea, and because the parents wanted a better future for the two sons, according to Kang. The father and mother are unemployed and the older son is a fisherman ) hence their decision to come by fishing boat. The ROK embassy, which has not been in direct contact with the family but has been briefed by MOFA, confirmed press reports that one of the sons had been carrying "less than one gram" of some type of "amphetamine," which family members claimed they planned to use to "rehabilitate" themselves, "relieve pain and/or suffering," and/or to "energize" themselves from exhaustion after being at sea for several days. Kang also reported that one son carried some type of "poison" that family members intended to use to commit suicide if DPRK authorities intercepted the boat.

13. (C) The ROK embassy, according to Kang, has not received an official request from Japan to take the refugees. He noted, however, that the ROK would accept the family if asked. South Korean law mandates that Seoul grant ROK citizenship to DPRK refugees. The ROK embassy representatives did not know how long the Japanese investigation would take, but Kang played down press reports that seemed to indicate police planned to investigate family members for being North Korean spies and/or drug smugglers. (Note: June 6 media reports suggest that Japanese authorities' suspicions were raised by the presence of a second boat engine, large quantities of diesel fuel and the amphetamine, among other factors that cast doubt of the

family's story of impoverishment.)

14. (C) Kang noted that it had been 20 years since the previous case of "boat people" from North Korea. In January 1987, a boat load of DPRK refugees, including some family members, arrived and were eventually sent via Taiwan to South Korea.  
SCHIEFFER